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ABSTRACT

There is psychological evidence to support the theory that many abused children become abusers themselves. This study investigates the probabilities of classroom abuse by teachers in relation to their past abuse experiences. A second purpose of the study is to create a self-help handbook for teachers from dysfunctional families who are in need of support and guidance (dysfunctional and abuse are defined as physical, sexual, or emotional and may be the result of alcoholism, addictions, or learned behavioral patterns). The main body of the document presents a guide for organizing support groups for teachers from dysfunctional families in schools, school districts, and communities. The guide describes the DTeach Family Group, a 12-step self-help group. It includes the following components: the 12 steps; the 12 traditions; a suggested group structure; meetings and procedures; suggested ideas for meetings; planning a meeting program; sample preamble/welcome and closing; how to start a group; suggestions for topics; slogans; and a list of other organizations that deal with crisis, drugs and alcohol, family services, and prevention. (Contains 12 references.) (LL)

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DTEACH FAMILY GROUPS

A HANDBOOK FOR DYSFUNCTIONAL TEACHERS

December, 1992

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DTEACH FAMILY GROUPS: A HANDBOOK FOR DYSFUNCTIONAL TEACHERS

By
JoAnn Reviczky

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Education degree in the
Department of Education
Plymouth State College
December, 1992

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Little Ways...

If I can be a candle
That makes some corner bright
I will not ask to be the moon
That brightens all the night.
I might just be one flower
And not a mighty tree.
But even one small blossom
Can be beautiful to see.
So if there's just one someone
Whom I can help to bless.
I'll be content with little ways
Of spreading happiness.

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous current and dated studies concerned with child abuse--alcoholism, addiction and neglect--and the implications of such behavior on children in the classroom. Many such studies reflect indiscriminate disruptive outbursts of students--use of abusive language, withdrawal, physical attacks--in the schools in response to the abuse, and intervention/reporting policies implemented in communities and school systems. New Hampshire--as in all states--for instance has a "law written to mandate reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect to the New Hampshire Division for Children and Youth Services" known as RSA 169:C (Falk, Ganem & Hill p2).

These issues should not be undervalued, however, it is conceivable that those in the positions to report such abuse--ministers, counselors, teachers etc.--are themselves abuse victims or are in fact perpetrators of abuse. There is psychological evidence that supports the theory that many abused children become abusers, although there is little scientific proof of these allegations (Starr, 1982 and Brommel & Galvin, 1991). The purpose of this study is to investigate the probabilities of classroom abuse by teachers in relation to those teachers' past abuse experiences, and to create a self help handbook for teachers from dysfunctional families.

ABUSE/DYSFUNCTION

For the purpose of this project, dysfunctional and abuse will be defined as physical, sexual or emotional and may be the result of alcoholism, addictions or learned behavioral patterns. According to James Garbarino and Gwen Gilliam (1980) and Timothy Iverson and Marilyn Segal (1990) emotional abuse includes refusal of the parent to support or be responsive to the child and punishment or rejection of the child's' normal behavior. Sexual abuse is any inappropriate sexual act on the infant, child or adolescent, whereas physical abuse is any "developmentally damaging use of force" (Garbarino & Gilliam, 1980 pp. 7-14). Starr (1982) cites psychological data which view abuse as a multi-dimensional phenomenon manifested by cultural attitudes of violence--such as that which emanates from the media, news, movies and commercials--community support systems of abuse such as advocation of corporal punishment in schools, and familial practices of accepted punishment standards for instance; hitting and spanking.

AT RISK

"The list of factors that put students at high risk of failing in school and in life is a long one. It includes poor basic skills, low self esteem, chronic truancy, eating disorders, sexual promiscuity... delinquent behavior, drug abuse...Living in a household where drugs and alcohol are chronically abused is a factor that is less frequently mentioned; yet it puts millions of children at extreme risk of failure in school and/or life and may be behind many other risk factors." It is estimated that there are between six and sixty five million children of alcoholics today (Towers, 1989).

ABUSE AFFECTS EVERYONE

Abusers and addicts hurt all those which surround them and break down any stability and unity inherent in a family system (Towers, 1989). Results of abuse vary from individual to individual, although most show signs of insecurity, shame, guilt, fear, loneliness and an inability to trust from childhood into adult life (DeMonnin, 1990, Towers, 1989 and Holzman & Strickland, 1988). According to Janet Woititz adult children of alcoholics have difficulty following projects through from

beginning to end and guess at what normal is because they have insufficient role models. People from dysfunctional families have problems with boundaries and relationships, and tend to isolate themselves from society (Starr, 1982 and Towers, 1989). Children of abuse are often sick and do not perform well in school, others demonstrate their unhappiness with overt disruptive even dangerous conduct.

ABUSED JUVENILES CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Extreme deviant behavior is recorded by Barbara Bard, Marilyn Feldman and their colleagues in an article entitled "Neuropsychiatric, Psychoeducational, and Family Characteristics of 14 Juveniles Condemned to Death in the United States." In the article, the authors detail the behavior and maltreatment of the fourteer juveniles they interviewed and the relationship to the crimes committed. Many of the teens suffered traumatic brain injuries due to accidents, beatings, or falls while some still suffered from severe emotional damage created by the abuse sustained during childhood. In almost all cases the children were harshly abused by parents or guardians. For instance: five of the juveniles on death row for violent crimes had been sodomized; nine had been brutally, physically abused by older male relatives and some were used as "subjects to vent (their)

rages and to satisfy (their) sexual appetites." Alcoholism drug abuse and dysfunctional family dynamics were prevalent in all the cases. There is no direct correlation between these and similar studies of children and juveniles from dysfunctional families--who commit crimes of violence, or whose acts are socially inappropriate--and the dysfunctional behaviors of adults. However, I would speculate that there is a connection between those who were abused as children and the crimes or inappropriate acts they commit as adults. In schools in particular there is evidence of excessive force or punishment exhibited by teachers.

ABUSIVE ADULT BEHAVIOR/ARBITRATION

In 1986 Robert Coulson documented fifty nine grievance cases in his book Arbitration in the Schools. An Analysis of Fifty-Nine Grievance Arbitration Cases. Coulson discusses the problem of discipline versus corporal punishment and asks many questions including; "Is it ever appropriate for a teacher to use physical force?" and "How should schools treat the alcoholic teacher or the teacher who misbehaves while drunk?" In the first chapter "Discipline and Violence," Coulson reveals three cases which differentiate discipline and corporal punishment according to community structure. The first involves a teacher

who taps a student in the side with a ruler to stop her from talking in class. Unknown to the teacher the student has just had an appendectomy. The girl's mother complained to the principal and the teacher was eventually brought before an arbitration board. They found that the teacher did not use excessive force on the student because many others in the school system behaved in much the same manner during classroom disruptions.

In another instance, a teacher substituting in a math class attempted to calm a disruptive class down and grabbed the so called ring leader out of his chair by the scruff of his neck causing scratches and bruises. Again the teacher was brought before a board which found that the injuries were accidental and not serious enough to warrant dismissal. The teacher was only suspended for three months without pay. One physical education teacher punished a disorderly deaf student by making him sit by the wall in the locker room. As the boy was sitting the teacher kicked his leg causing the boy to fall and then proceeded to hold and push him down on the floor. This particular teacher had previously harmed other students but was not fired from his job merely suspended for a week without pay. The boards reasoning was that many teachers were suspended for a day or so in the same school system for slapping a child so a week seemed appropriate. It appears from such cases that it is difficult to differentiate corporal punishment from discipline, thereby giving credence to Starrs' statement that the community supports if not perpetuates household and classroom

abuse.

APPROPRIATE VS. INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

In similar situations other teachers might have reacted differently to the apparent disruptions than those mentioned in Coulsons article. They may have even intervened to avoid escalating the problem. The abusive teachers perhaps may have been unable to react 'appropriately' because they themselves were victims of abuse and saw their behavior as expected, appropriate or even normal under the circumstances. My intentions for explicating the topics of abuse--especially classroom abuse--is not to expose or condemn teachers for acting as the teachers in Coulsons book, but rather to enlighten and aid teachers who may be from dysfunctional families and in need of support and guidance. The following is a guide for organizing support groups for teachers from dysfunctional families in their school/school district and communities. The self-help group is based on the concepts of AA, AL-ANON and ACOA and its' primary purpose is to initiate the healing process through involvement with others and an exploration of self.

THE TWELVE STEPS

1.) We admitted we were powerless over the past abuse--that our lives had become unmanageable.

2.) Came to believe that a Power greater then ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3.) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.

4.) Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves

5.) Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6.) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7.) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8.) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9.) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10.) Continued to take person inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11.) Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.

12.) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I
cannot change,
courage to change the
things I can, and the
wisdom to know the difference.

STEP ONE--It may be difficult to admit we are not sufficiently strong, or wise, or determined to conquer the problems that confront us. We may think our difficulties can be overcome

by trying to control or stop the abuser from abusing (abuser being any abuse--drug, alcohol, physical, sexual or emotional).

We may still believe we can change the irrational behavior of the abuser. We begin our recovery when we bring ourselves to realize we are trying to control something that is beyond our powers: abuse; that we are just as powerless as the sick and troubled abuser is to bring about a change by will of force alone.

STEP TWO--Is an admission that the way we have been thinking, acting and living was not reasonable or sane. God can be anything you want Him/Her to be.

STEP THREE-- Once we have given our problem into another's hand, we can leave it there, making no stipulations. We have already proved to ourselves that our difficulties are beyond us. Only our hope for peace of mind lies in turning our will and our lives over to God as we understand Her/Him.

STEP FOUR-- A fourth step inventory helps us to take an honest look at ourselves as we really are. We have been preoccupied with what the abuser does that we fail to notice our own faults. This should not be an exercise in self condemnation but a fearless and searching inventory of ourselves so that we can track down our hidden faults such as: resentment, fearfulness, temper, self-pity, self-righteousness, impatience and intolerance.

STEP FIVE-- Admit the wrongs that we have located in Step four so that we may begin to heal and let it go.

STEP SIX--We may admit our faults and determine to correct them. But being human, we are still tempted to cling to old way of thinking and behaving. Confronted with the same crisis and irritations--at home or at school-- frustrations and despairs that have always aroused our anger and reproaches, it is hard to maintain poise and patience. Ask yourself if you really want to improve? Deeply ingrained habits are immensely difficult to change.

STEP SEVEN--This step entitles you and encourages you to ask for help.

STEP EIGHT to STEP ELEVEN--The next four steps clearly deal with others rather than yourself. Once we have admitted our wrongs it is important that we relieve ourselves of our burdens.

STEP TWELVE--Asks that we, after finding inner peace, help others to do the same.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

Just as the Twelve Steps guide the individual in his striving for personal growth and spiritual development, so the Twelve Traditions state the group purposes and principles.

1.) Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on unity.

2.) For our group purpose there is but one authority--a loving God as S/He may express Him/Herself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3.) The relatives of abusers, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves a Dysfunctional Family of Teachers, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem with abuse in a relative, friend or self.

4.) Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting another group or DTeach (Dysfunctional Teachers) as a whole.

5.) Each DTeach group has but one purpose to help families and teachers of abuse. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of Al-Anon ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our abusive relatives and friends (ourselves when necessary) and by welcoming and giving comfort to families and friends of abuse.

6.) Our Dysfunctional Family of Teachers ought never to endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.

7.) Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8.) DTeach Twelfth-Step work should remain forever non-professional.

9.) Our groups ought never be organized; but may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10.) The DTeach Groups have no opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11.) Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at

the level of press, radio, TV and films. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all DTeach members.

12.) Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.

(The Twelve-Steps and Twelve Traditions are taken from Al-Anon Family Groups (1986, 38-53).

SUGGESTED GROUP STRUCTURE

The setting of a DTeach group is a simple matter; it requires only enough form to assure orderly procedure and division of responsibility.

Each group should have a Chairman and a Secretary. If the group is not large enough to have a Treasurer, the Secretary may act as Treasure until there are enough members. Officers serve in rotation, usually volunteers who are elected for a term of one to three months.

The chairman opens the meeting with the Welcome or the Preamble, leads the group in the Serenity Prayer, introduces the speakers or announces the subject of the meeting, encourages all the members to take part in discussions, to ask questions or make comments. The chairman may lead and close the meeting or ask someone else to do so. S/he may also suggest topics for discussion or arrange for visiting speakers.

The Secretary keeps an up to date list of members names, addresses and phone numbers in order to contact them of upcoming

events and inform them of changes in the group. The Treasurer if the group has one--if not the Secretary--has the contribution basket passed at meeting, usually during an intermission. All contributions are voluntary and members who can not afford to contribute should never be pressed to donate. The expenses of the group are very small--rent, refreshments and literature. The treasurer should keep a ledger of all moneys and transactions pertaining thereto.

MEETINGS AND PROCEDURES

The general pattern of DTeach meetings is to have a Chairman or leader open and close the meeting and introduce guest speakers, or members who share their experiences with DTeach.

Meetings may open with a few moments of silence followed by the group's reciting the Serenity Prayer. The chairman or leader then reads the Preamble or Welcome to the Newcomers and reminds those present that the fellowship is anonymous and announces the subject of the meeting. The meeting ends with a suggested closing followed by a prayer which is said by all who wish to do so.

Meetings generally have a central theme. Even when the session is simply a round-table discussion, more can be accomplished by dealing with a single topic on which each member

expresses an opinion.

Closed meetings are restricted to members and prospective members only. Open meeting may be attended by anyone interested in the problem of abuse. Always welcome everyone warmly.

There is no rigid formula for a meeting. DTeach speakers identify themselves by their first names only and mention that they are from abusive or dysfunctional families or households. They may describe the various ways they have attempted to deal with the problem. Not every speaker's topic will appeal to everyone, but there is usually someone with whom others may identify. Opinions and ideas expressed at DTeach are those of the speakers and not necessarily those of the fellowship.

SUGGESTED IDEAS FOR MEETINGS

1.) Personal Story--Two or three members are asked before the meeting to tell how they came to believe that the DTeach program could help them make a new way of life.

2.) Beginners' Meeting--Newcomers find help more readily if their introduction to the program is simple and immediately workable. Beginners' meetings give them the fundamentals of the program and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions with less confusion than if they encounter unfamiliar terms and ideas all at once.

3.) Twelve Step--Some groups review a Step at each meeting. Interpretations can be found Al-Anon texts and other related literature.

4.) The Twelve Traditions--The group studies one of the Traditions and their value in maintaining group unity and growth.

5.) DTeach Slogans--One or more of the slogans may serve as

a basis for a round-table discussion.

6.) Panel Discussion--Two or three members are chosen by the leader to sit on a panel and answer questions which have been written anonymously by those present. Their answers serve as an opening to informal discussion by the entire group.
7.) Group Speakers--An occasional talk by a DTeach member is interesting and helpful. It should be suggested to the speaker that emphasis be placed on adjustments and cooperation at home and school rather than dwell on experiences of abuse.

8.) Adjustment Meeting--Members discuss the adjustments and changes occurring at school or at home since joining the group.

9.) Exchange Meeting--Speakers from other DTeach groups tell their stories.

10.) Outside Speakers--Those with experience in the field (clergy, doctors, social workers, psychologists) may be asked to speak at an occasional open DTeach meeting on related topics.

11.) Literature Meeting--Discussion of topics from related literature.

12.) Open Meeting--The function and usefulness of DTeach can be explained to a wider audience if an occasional open meeting is planned.

PLANNING A MEETING PROGRAM

Groups which plan their meeting in advance are more apt to give effective help and encouragement to their members. The Program Chairman perhaps, with the assistance of other members may plan topics in advance. The topic plan may be submitted to the group for approval.

PREAMBLE/WELCOME

The DTeach Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of abusers, have been abused in some form and may have become abusers themselves. We come together to share our experience, strength and hope in order to solve our problems. We believe abuse is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery. DTeach is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, institution does not engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. DTeach is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions. DTeach has but one purpose; to help teachers and families of abusive or dysfunctional backgrounds. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to others who have been abused and by giving understanding and encouragement to those who abuse.

CLOSING

In closing I would like to say that the opinions expressed here were strictly those of the person who gave them. Take what you liked and leave the rest. The things you heard were spoken

in confidence and should be treated as confidential. Keep them within the walls of this room and the confines of your mind. Follow with silent prayer and the entire group saying; "keep coming it works if you work it."

(The preceding was taken from Al-Anon Family Groups (1986, 141-153)

HOW TO START A GROUP

If your peace of mind is lost in anxiety and frustration over the problems of abuse, you can begin a group.

You may do so by contacting JoAnn Reviczky, RR 3 Box 93 A #2, Laconia, NH 03246 for information.

If you wish not to contact someone, use this handbook as a guideline, gather some friends or family you know to share the same difficulties and wishes to heal. Decide on a meeting place and time--meetings should be held consistently once a week. Carefully review the material contained in this handbook, and other related literature. GOOD-LUCK!!

SUGGESTIONS OF TOPICS

1.) Alcoholism/Drug Abuse

2.) Physical Abuse

3.) Sexual Abuse

4.) Emotional Abuse

5.) Family Problems: age, sibling rivalry etc.

6.) Classroom difficulties: discipline, emotion, aggression impatience, violence

7.) Implementing new techniques in the classroom: discipline, teaching techniques. (Refer to Charles, C.M.,(1992). Building Classroom Discipline. (4th Ed.). White Plains: Longman.

8.) What you as a teacher might do to restrain from punishing a student inappropriately.

9.) What you as teacher could do to prevent from humiliating students in the classroom.

10.) What you could do if your temper gets the best of you.

11.) Relaxation techniques

12.) Changing your behavior: new approaches to abuse.

SLOGANS

First Things First

Easy Does It

Live and Let Live

But for the Grace of God

Keep an Open Mind

Let Go and Let God

Just for Today

(Al-Anon Family Groups)

The above are pretty self explanatory--just remember they are to help everyone to stop, think and relax.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

(addresses are provided when available)

your local Chamber of Commerce
or the Greater Laconia Chamber of Commerce
9 Veterans Square
Laconia, NH 03246
(603) 524-5531

your local United Way
or United Way
95 Water Street
Laconia, NH 03246
(603)524-6864

CRISIS

New Beginnings
1-800-852-3388

Lakes Region Family Service
(domestic violence and sexual assault)
(603)524-5835

HELPLINE
Community Services Council of
Merrimack County
2 Industrial Park Drive
Concord, NH 03301
(603)225-9000
1-800-852-3388

United Way
(603)524-2733

Belknap County Mediation Program
2 Airport Road
Gilford, NH 03246
(resolution of disputes between family members, schools/parents and schools/studets)
(603)524-9000
(603)524-9002

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Horizons Counseling Center
(603)524-8005

Al-Anon/Alateen/ACOA
63 School Street
P.O. Box 132
Concord, NH 03302-0132
1-800-334-2666
(603)225-2666

AA
321 Lincoln Street
Manchester, NH 03103
(603) 622-6967

CODA
191 Sudberry Road
Concord, MA 01742
(617)259-9624
(508)369-7810

FAMILY SERVICES

Department of Child and Youth Services
1-800-458-5542

NH Alliance of Children and Youth
(603)225-0900

NH Task Force of Child Abuse
P.O. Box 607
Concord, NH 03301
(603)225-5441

Parents Without Partners
P.O. Box 272
Portsmouth, NH 03801
(603)880-3817
(603)641-9407

The Friends Program, Inc.
249 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301
(603)228-1193
(603)228-1462

PREVENTION

UPSTREAM
Partnership for Primary Prevention

c/o Information and Referral
Belknap Mill, Beacon Street East
Laconia, NH 03246
(603)524-2733

NH Office of Drug Abuse Prevention
1-800-852-3345 Ext. 6100

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